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ABSTRACT

The influence of language style and gender on perspectives of leadership potential is a function of the interrelationships among gender, language style, and desirable or relevant characteristics of the type of leader sought. The notion that choice, perceptions, and evaluations of language style are goal-related has been acknowledged in the literature reviewed. Specifically, researchers have argued that perceptions of an individual based on his or her language style influence that individual's acceptability for attaining certain goals. Scholars agree that deferential and nondeferential language produce different listener perceptions. Moreover, gender and/or context/goals simultaneously affect perceptions and thus, subsequent behavior. Fewer women assuming leadership roles indicates the presence of gender bias and gender stereotyping. While a literature review of relevant research indicates that the influence of language style and gender on leadership potential interrelates with the type of leader sought, further empirical research is needed on the degree to which these factors are interrelated. (Contains 117 references.) (RS)

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THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE STYLE AND GENDER ON PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL: A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

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THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE STYLE AND GENDER ON PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL: A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

While a good deal of literature on gender and language style, and gender and leadership is available, there seems to be a distinct lack of research focusing on the relationship between language style and gender on perceptions of leadership potential. Given the fact that women still do not emerge as leaders as often as men, it follows that gender issues and language in the leadership context require further investigation.

It is now widely recognized that the situation is instrumental in influencing which language style will most appropriately achieve the goals of the listener and speaker, regardless of the speaker's sex. Therefore, different language styles may serve to meet different goals. Further, leadership emergence, once thought to be a function of characteristics possessed by relatively few individuals, is viewed now to depend on a series of variables. These include the group's characteristics, the gender composition, and the perceived ability of individuals to meet the group's goals. This leads me to believe that gender and language style have important implications for goal attainment and thus, choice of leaders to meet these goals. I argue in this work that leadership potential is a function of the interrelationships among gender, language style, and desirable or relevant characteristics of the type of leader sought.

I will develop this argument by presenting a synthesis of

pertinent literature. For this work, leadership is operationalized as a leader of either as task group or a social group and language style will be discussed from a deferential versus a nondeferential perspective.

LANGUAGE STYLE AND GENDER

Language Style

A few early researchers (Jespersen, 1922; Reik, 1954) attempted to explore the issue of gender and language style but it was Lakoff's work (1973; 1974; 1975) that spawned the wealth of research in this area. Based on introspection, and meant as a "taking-off point for further studies" (Lakoff, 1973, p. 47), she attempted to outline the differences in the way males and females are encouraged to use language. She isolated a set of language markers that she referred to as "women's language" - a style she thought was confined to women's use. She posited that women are more likely to employ the following types of syntactical and lexical items: tag questions, disclaimers, polite forms, few to no expletives, more discriminations in naming colors, intonational patterns that essentially make declarative sentences sound like questions, and so forth. Because this type of language use is frequently associated with women, it was (and still is to a certain extent) considered women's language. Support for and/or extension of this stance is found in the writings of Dubois and Crouch, (1975), Eakins and Eakins, (1978), Kramarae, (1981), Kramer, Thorne, and Henley, (1978), Liska,

Mechling, and Stathas, (1981), Spender, (1980), Thorne and Henley, (1975) et cetera.

However, Erickson, Lind, Johnson, and O'Barr (1978) sparked a series of studies examining language style in the courtroom setting. The researchers, among the first scholars to associate language style with context, concluded that both males and females engaged in what was considered women's language when they we were called upon as witnesses. Speech style was attributed to social status rather than to the sex of the witness and they subsequently labelled this style "powerless language." Bradac and Mulac (1984) reported that both powerful and powerless persons seem to use different speech styles with the powerless style containing more hedges, intensifiers, hesitations, tag questions, polite speech, and so forth. Researchers have come to agree that speech style then, is contextual rather than gender specific (Crosby & Nyquist, 1977; Dubois & Crouch, 1975; Erickson et al, 1978; Lind & O'Barr, 1979; Moore, 1983; Rubin & Nelson, 1983; Wiley & Eskilson, 1985). Still identified by Lakoff's designated markers, "women's language" is referred to in the literature as female register (Crosby & Nyquist, 1977), powerless speech (Erickson, Lind, Johnson, & O-Barr, 1978), deferential language (Liska, Mechling, & Stathas, 1981), and ingratiating language (Bohra & Pandy, 1984). I prefer the term "deferential" as it seems less value laden than the others. That is, it assuages values like gender and status that are inherent in some of the other labels.

LANGUAGE STYLE AND LISTENER PERCEPTIONS

Language style has implications for leadership potential because listener perceptions vary according to the speaker's rhetorical style. For instance, witnesses using deferential language were perceived as less competent, less attractive, less trustworthy, less dynamic, and less convincing (Bradac, Hemphill, & Tardy, 1981; Lind & O'Barr, 1979). These are not the qualities one associates with task leadership. In fact, communication scholars agree that dynamism and trustworthiness are two major components of the credibility factor required for leadership emergence. Wright and Hosman (1983) reported that witnesses using few hedges were observed as significantly more attractive than those using a large number and both men and women were thought to be more attractive when use of intensifiers was low. Contrary to what is generally reported in the literature, Warfel's (1984) study of gender schemas and perceptions of speech style in the courtroom setting indicated that deferential language users were perceived as more competent.

Overall, deferential language users are thought to be higher in social warmth, more submissive, less willing to take a stand (Liska, Stathas, & Mechling, 1981), and less assertive (Liska, Stathas & Mechling, 1981; Newcombe & Arnkoff, 1979). In terms of tag questions, qualifiers, and compound requests, Newcombe and Arnkoff (1979) found that when males and females used tag questions they were perceived as less assertive. Those individuals engaging in qualified speech were also viewed as less

assertive but warmer than users of nonqualified speech. Users of compound requests too were viewed as less assertive, but more polite and warm. Other studies reported that deferential language speakers were considered more feminine (Liska, Mechling & Stathas, 1981; Quina et al, 1984), less dominant (Warfel, 1984), less credible and attractive (Bradac, Hemphill & Tardy, 1981; Bradac & Mulac, 1984), but more polite and friendly (Quina, Wingard, & Bates, 1987).

Persons engaging in nondeferential language, on the other hand, are generally rated more positively - as more aggressive, and as more successful on the job (Wiley & Eskilson, 1985). The results of one study suggested that they were more organized, competent, systematic, decisive, intelligent, confident, logical, serious, and stronger than deferential speakers (Quina, Wingard & Bates, 1987). Liska, Mechling and Stathas (1981) reported nondeferential speakers to be perceived as assertive, dominant, believable, and willing to take a stand, but less friendly and warm.

Speaker sex also influences interpretations based on language style. Wright and Hosman (1983) found that women who used a large number of intensifiers were seen as more attractive than men who did so (Wright & Hosman, 1983). Females who used qualified speech were considered to be more polite and warmer than males who used this speech style (Newcombe & Arnkoff, 1979). Rasmussen and Moely (1986) reported that men who engaged in a deferential language style were thought to be homosexuals and

Bradley (1981) found that women who used disclaimers were considered less intelligent than men who used them. The results of these studies signify that women and men are rated as much by their biological sex as by their language style. Rater sex also influences the perception of deferential language users. For example, Newcombe and Arnkoff (1979) found that female subjects rate speakers using tag questions more warmly than do male subjects.

It is clear that gender bias affects individuals' judgments. Several other factors influence listener perceptions. Of particular concern are language gender-linked stereotyes, context, and goal. Next, I will investigate and attempt to demonstrate how these factors influence leader selection.

Gender-linked Stereotypes

Ideal Speech

Kramer (1978) defines ideal speech as the use of linguistic, verbal, and nonverbal features that promote effective communication. Studies attempting to assess ideal speech report that female speech comes closer to the ideal (Giles, Scholes & Young, 1983; Kramer, 1978; Murdock & Konsky, 1982). Yet "male" language use is stereotypically considered standard and "ideal" speech is typically associated with males (Eakins & Eakins, 1978; Giles, Scholes, & Young, 1983; Kramer, 1978; Mulac & Lundell, 1982). Thus, women stereotypically receive lower ratings than men (Berryman & Wilcox, 1980; Bradley, 1981;

Newcombe & Arnkoff, 1979; Wright & Hosman, 1983) when in fact they may be engaging in more effective communication strategies. While the indices of ideal speech and deferential language may differ, the conclusions of these studies imply that women may be rated less favorably than men not on the basis of speech style, but rather on the basis of gender.

Mulac, Incontro and James (1985), however, found that the language effect was stronger than the stereotype - that the two operate independently while Mulac and Lundell (1982) reported that, based on actual speech, women were rated more highly in social-intellectual status and aesthetic quality. Zahn (1989) concluded that, "Idiolectic and contextual variation are more important factors in the evaluation of speakers than sex-linked variation" (p. 69).

Even though the operational definitions and dependent measures differ substantially across studies examining "ideal" speech, the inconsistent conclusions stress the influence of contextual or situational determinants as well as gender stereotyping in speaker assessment.

Ascribing Deferential Language to Women

While women are stereotypically thought to engage in deferential language more often than men (Quina, Wingard, & Bates, 1987; Seigler & Seigler, 1976), there is no conclusive evidence of this in the empirical literature. Regarding the use of tag questions, for instance, there is data to confirm three

different convictions: that men use more (Dubois and Crouch, 1975); that women use more (Hartman, 1976; Gleason & Weintraub, 1978), and that there is no difference in usage (Baumann, 1976; Martin & Craig, 1983; Mulac, Lundell, & Bradac, 1986).

Brouwer et al. (1979), in a study analyzing linguistic differences in males and females purchasing train tickets in Amsterdam reported that, "All the kinds of utterances that women are characteristically supposed to use more often than men - utterances, insecurity and politeness - were used by both women and men when speaking to the male ticket seller" (p. 47). There was a significant main effect for sex of ticket sellers on the following dependent variables: use of diminutives, use of civilities, use of hesitations, and number of words. Martin and Craig (1982) found similar results with one exception. While both males and females used the same number of qualifying words when talking to males, males used less and females used more disclaimers when talking to females. This may reflect physical, social or psychological agendas.

The incongruent conclusions drawn by scholars regarding the effects of stereotyping suggest the influence of additional situational determinants. Since language style has implications for goal achievement, an explanation of gender-linked characteristics must be conducted in order to facilitate complete theoretical explanations of perceptions based on language characteristics of males and females. For further discussion of the influence of gender on perceptions related to speech style,

see Goldberg (1968), Liska (1992), Mischel (1974), Mulac & Rudd (1977), Quina, Wingard & Bates (1987), Warfel (1984), Reiser & Troost (1986), and Zahn, 1989.

Verbal Output Stereotypes

Relevant to gender stereotyping and leadership potential is the common belief that women talk more than men. This gender-linked stereotype, however, is not always supported empirically (Argyle, Lalljee & Cook, 1968; Haas, 1979; Hilpert, Kramer & Clark 1975; Kramer, 1974; Smith, 1979; Swacker, 1975; Wood, 1966). For instance, Swacker (1975) found significantly greater mean speaking times for males (780.29 seconds) than females (221.70 seconds) describing pictures orally. Martin and Craig (1982), on the other hand, found "no significant differences between males and females in the amount of talk as measured by the number of words produced or the mean length of utterance" (p. 25) during initial social interactions of same-sex and mixed-sex student dyads. Nor did Brouwer et al. (1979) find any differences in the mean number of words used by males and females when purchasing train tickets. The conclusions of these studies suggest that verbiage is not a function of gender, but rather, a function of context and goal.

There exists an interrelationship among verbiage, deferential language, gender, and context. Deferential language users generally take more words to convey messages because of the inclusion of the additional language markers. Perhaps women are

considered to talk more because they are stereotypically associated with contexts that place them in subordinate positions. People in subordinate positions are more apt to adopt a deferential (or powerless) language style (Erickson, Lind, Johnson, & O'Barr, 1978). On the other hand, certain contexts require more language than do others. Buying a train ticket, regardless of gender, requires relatively few words. Reporting responses/reactions at a professional meeting requires more statements because of the complexity of the messages to be conveyed. The inconsistent results of the verbiage studies suggest that although language style could in some instances be gender related, it seems reasonable to conclude that communicative language style is associated with the goal relevant aspects of the situation.

Context and Goal

The explanations of the results of the Brouwer et al, (1979) and the Crosby & Nyquist (1977) studies can be used to argue for the relationship between language style and goal. For instance, criticism may be directed toward the Brouwer (1979) study (which found no language style differences between males and females purchasing train tickets) for its narrow focus and limited interactional time span. It is, however, the very narrow focus of this context which strengthens the goal/context argument. The goal in this situation is clear - to purchase a ticket and in this context males and females select the same language style to

attain this goal. In the Crosby and Nyquist (1977) study, the authors found no significant difference in the language style of 107 males and 90 females making "inquiries at an information booth at an urban municipal center" (p. 116). These two studies unintentionally suggest that language style is goal related.

The notion that goal and/or situation influences choice and/or perceptions of language style has been established in the literature (Forgas, 1983; Giles & Hewstone, 1982; Hymes, 1972; Kemper, 1984; Rolls, 1991; Liska, 1992; Schrader & Liska, 1991). While Kemper (1984) defined goal attainment as either stereotypically masculine (e.g. getting the lawn cut) or as stereotypically feminine (e.g. getting a cup of tea made), she found that masculine goals required "male" speech and feminine goals required "female" speech. Even though the results of this study raise a number of questions, they do provide support for the notion that selection of language style is related to goal attainment.

Schrader & Liska (1990) found that deferential language was characterized as a more positive language style to achieve the following goals: (1) expressing negative feelings about a mutual friend; (2) discussing dissatisfaction with members of a study group; (3) convincing a housemate to make some behavioral changes; (4) attempting to have an attendance policy modified; and (5) asking two friends to critique a job presentation. In addition, the authors reported that ". . . the significant differences across communicator goals in perceptions of the

individual styles indicates that those perceptions are not static but vary with the goal; that is, perceptions of nondeferential and deferential conversational styles vary depending on the goal" (p. 14).

The relevant literature on gender and language suggests that use of deferential language and nondeferential language styles produce different listener perceptions. Moreover, gender and context/goals influence perceptions and selection of language style. We might speculate then, that based on inferred characteristics, perceptions about an individual would influence their leadership potential for both task and social/support groups, both of which differ in their goals.

LEADERSHIP

The influence of language style on leadership potential has been virtually ignored in the empirical literature. The few studies that do examine language in this context limit their purview to verbal style and verbal output. The literature in this section will review these areas and include studies focusing on gender stereotyping and perception of leaders.

Verbal Style and Leadership

Moore (1983) and his colleagues examined spoken language differences that included tag questions, disclaimers, qualifiers and fillers in a dyadic leadership context. They sought to determine the extent to which language differences in leadership

situations are gender or situationally related and found that, in a card sorting task, the use of tag questions, disclaimers and fillers did not differ between male and female subjects. However, "Qualifying or self-deprecating statements tend(ed) to be uttered more frequently by males, especially when instructing females" (p. 50). The authors concluded that spoken language differences appear to reflect the speakers's sensitivity to the individual they are instructing. More generally, the researchers submit that gender-related spoken language differences are not generalizable across settings but are, instead, situationally specific.

Gitter, Black and Fishman (1975) explored the influence of strong verbal communication (operationalized as forceful and persuasive language) and weak verbal communication (operationalized as unconvincing with the use of circular reasoning) on leadership potential. The results supported the use of strong verbal communication as a better indicator of leadership selection. Some research explores verbal output as a function of leadership potential. The findings show that those who do the talking emerge as leaders (Bales, 1953; Bass, 1949, Borgatta and Bales, 1956; Regula and Julian, 1973). More recently, Sorrentino and Boutillier (1975) supported this stance and found that, "Ratings of task leadership . . . are significantly affected by quantity of verbal interaction but not quality" (p. 407).

There is general agreement in the literature that the

interactional patterns of men and women in small groups differ substantially in that men talk more and interrupt women more than they interrupt men. These conclusions suggest that men are more likely than women to emerge as leaders. In the next section, general findings on the influence of sex roles on leadership emergence and perceptions of leaders will be discussed.

Gender and Leadership Emergence

The notion that men assume leadership roles more often than women has received strong support in the literature (Andrews, 1992; Baird, 1976; Bradley, 1980; Eskilson & Wiley, 1976; Hegstrom & Griffith, 1992; Hollander & Yoder, 1980; Magargee, 1969; Nyquist & Spence, 1986; Rosenkrantz et al, 1968; Snodgrass & Rosenthal, 1984; White, DeSanctis & Crino, 1981). Even in fields like library and informaion science where women make up 80% of the personnel, they hold only 20% of the management positions (Murgai, 1991).

Baird (1976) might relate this phenomenon to role theory in that both sexes may not expect women to emerge as leaders. For instance, Porter, Geis, & Jennings (1983) showed slides of five-person groups seated at a rectangular table to subjects who were asked, on the basis of this nonverbal information, to rate each group member. "It was predicted that the person seated at the head of the table would be seen as the leader in the single-sex groups and the mixed-sex groups with a male head, but not in mixed-sex group with a female head" (p. 1040). The

predictions were supported, suggesting that role expectations and situational characteristics influence leadership emergence. Hollander & Yoder (1980) found that when groups elect a leader, that person is more likely to be a male. Bunyi & Andrews (1985) reported that gender composition is related to leader emergence. They found that, "In mixed-gender male-majority groups, the males were perceived as emerging as leaders significantly more often than the females" (p. 257). Hegstrom & Griffith (1992) also confirmed that in mixed-gender groups, males emerged as leader more often, regardless of how the men scored on a dominance scale. Andrews (1984), however, reported that when performance self esteem is high, either sex is equally as likely to be chosen as leaders.

Perceptions of Leaders

As a result of the women's movement and the introduction of labour laws, women are slowly gaining positions of power. Hence, the more recent research focuses on perceptions of subordinates. The experimenters generally conclude that subjects are equally satisfied with male and female leaders (Kushell & Newton, 1986; Rosen & Jerdee 1973; Stitt, Schmidt & Price, 1983). Bartol & Wortman (1975) found that male and female subordinates did not describe male and female superiors differently. Interestingly, Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) in a meta-analysis of the research on the evaluation of leaders, reported that there was a small tendency for female leaders to be evaluated less favourably

than male leaders. When women held traditionally male dominated positions or they engaged in an authoritarian or directive style of leadership, the tendency to devalue the female leaders was even more pronounced.

Bartol & Butterfield (1976) compared assessments of male and female leaders using four leadership styles: initiating structure, production emphasis, consideration, and tolerance for freedom. They found that males were valued more highly on initiating structure, females were valued more highly on consideration, and there were no differences in production emphasis and tolerance for freedom.

Leader perception is also related to the task and social dimensions of leadership. Stereotypically, males are associated with the task dimension and females are associated with the consideration dimension. Cann and Siegfried (1990) confirmed this. They found that consideration behaviors were perceived as feminine, and structuring behaviors were thought of as masculine. Male leaders are rated higher on task competence (Morrison & Stein, 1985) while females are expected to do more poorly in task situations (Baird, 1976; Johnson, 1976).

Accounting for these perceptions might be the fact that both males and females associate leadership with an authoritarian leadership style (Linimon, Barron & Falbo, 1989) and even women base their leadership ratings on stereotypical notions of leadership (Linimon, Barron, & Falbo, 1989). But Eskilson & Wiley (1976) concluded that women do direct more activity toward

creating positive group affect than do men. And Eagly and Johnson (1990) in a meta-analysis of gender and leadership style, discovered that across categories of studies (organizational, laboratory experimental, or assessment), women tended to adopt a democratic or participatory style. Men exhibited leadership behaviors.

However, Serafini & Pearson (1984) found no differences in the skills exhibited by male and female leaders. Bartol & Wartman (1975) in a study consisting of 202 civil service supervisory and nonsupervisory employees at a large government operated psychiatric hospital found that female supervisors were rated higher on initiating structure than were males. Maier (1970) reported that, "Female leaders, given a management solution to a problem, will be as persuasive and tactful as male leaders in getting a supplies solution adopted by their group members (workers)" (p. 460).

Other factors influence evaluation. Alderton & Jurma (1980) found that both males and females were equally satisfied with male and female leaders as long as they used similar frequencies of task-oriented behavior. Demonstrating a skill (Bunyi & Andrews, 1985) and using evidence to support one's views positively affected influence and credibility ratings for both males and females (Bradley, 1981). Women indicating task relevant competence immediately before a group problem solving session were more influential than women who did not demonstrate such competence (Bradley, 1980).

The investigations provided thus far suggest that sex-roles influence heavily the judgments and notions regarding leadership in small groups. Too, the conflicting outcomes emphasize the complicated nature of leadership perception and emergence. Arguments related to the goal relevant aspects or contextual elements of leadership add to the complexity. I am interested in the influence of language style and gender in both the task and social small group contexts. Very little scholarly work has been completed in this area. Morrison and his colleagues (1976; 1984; 1985) however, do examine how both women and men are perceived as leaders of T-groups and Tavistock groups. These groups are relevant because they resemble support and task groups respectively.

The Task and Social Group Contexts

Generally, the goal of a T-group is to provide members with opportunities to change their communication patterns. T-group leaders take an active role to facilitate change and engage in behaviors that include modelling, self-disclosure, et cetera. While language style is not addressed specifically, it is reasonable to suppose that a more deferential language style would be appropriate in this context. In contrast, the Tavistock experience is less socially and emotionally rewarding to participants as it concentrates on the analytic task, to the exclusion of the social-emotional component (Morrison & Stein, 1985). The series of studies comparing participant ratings of

male and female leaders in each of these contexts suggest that leaders (trainers) of T-groups generally receive higher ratings than leaders (consultants) of Tavistock groups. Further, male T-group trainers were more positively valued than female trainers or male consultants suggesting that males who are socio-emotional sensitive are rated more highly.

These studies provide strong support for the type of leadership characteristics called for in various groups. In addition, they suggest that member associations for gender may be a more powerful determinant of their appraisals than leadership style.

CONCLUSIONS

I set out in this work to argue that the influence of language style and gender on perceptions of leadership potential is a function of the interrelationships among gender, language style, and desirable or relevant characteristics of the type of leader sought. The notion that choice, perceptions, and evaluations of language style are goal related has been acknowledged in the literature (Cronkhite & Liska, 1980; Forgas, 1983; Hynes, 1972; Kemper, 1984; Rolls, 1991; Schrader and Liska, 1991). Specifically, these researchers have argued that perceptions of an individual based on his or her language style influence that individual's acceptability for attaining certain goals. Rolls (1991) carried out one empirical test of the influence of language style and gender on percpetions of leadership potential. Although the results do not support the

supposition argued in this work, the author discusses how the socio-cultural backgrounds of the subjects may have made the analysis a parochial one. The outcome of the Rolls investigation does not invalidate the argument presented in this paper but rather it endorses the call for further empirical testing to determine the nature and degree of the interrelationship among language style, gender, and the desirable characteristics for the type of leader sought.

Scholars agree that deferential and nondeferential language produce different listener perceptions. Moreover, gender and/or context/goals simultaneously affect perceptions and thus, subsequent behavior. Given that fewer women assume leadership roles indicates the presence of gender bias and gender stereotyping. While I conclude that the influence of language style and gender on leadership potential interrelates with the type of leader sought, what demands further inquiry is the degree to which these factors are interrelated. Thus, I would encourage empirical research to further support his stance.

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